000 good as theirs. To a number of people, several of whom are mentioned in the book, I am indebted for the help and information they have given me, especially to the Khan Bahadur Abdur Razzak, formerly British Residency Agent at Sharjah; to Mr. Williamson, geologist to the Basrah Petroleum Company; and to Captain Richard Bird, of the Political Service; I am also very grateful to Mr. John Fry, Librarian of the British Overseas Airways Corporation at Whitchurch, for his invaluable assistance in reading through my manuscript and suggesting improvements.

● 114 I was only one of many R.A.F. officers, seconded to the B.O.A.C. during the war, who held administrative posts on civil air routes throughout the world, and in tribute to their untiring efforts and unrewarded zeal in maintaining a constant flow of supplies to our armies in the Far East, I cannot do better than quote from an article which appeared in *The Times* of 6th January, 1945.

000 'Some of the loneliest war-time jobs are those being carried out by British Overseas Airways staff at remote points along their 70,000 miles of overseas routes. War conditions force these men to remain at these outposts for long periods, often without a single day's leave for months, and with few contacts with the outside world.

'At some of the wayside stations there are only two or three Europeans, and for some a brief chat with the flying crews is their only contact with other white men for weeks at a time. There are some of the lesser used stations where only an occasional aeroplane puts down for half an hour to refuel. There are thousands of these lonely men up and down B.O.A.C.'s war-time routes. Their job is to see the mails through, to be part of the chain which is transporting necessities to the fighting men, and to serve along routes carrying ministers, governors, service chiefs, and hundreds of others on missions vital to the nation's war effort.

'Probably the toughest of these routes lies along the coast of Southern Arabia, on what is known as the Hadramaut route from Cairo to Karachi. The Hadramaut coast is wild and waterless. The men stationed at Riyan, some two hundred miles from Aden, call the place "Hell Spot". Also on this route are Sharjah and Karaman Island, often referred to as "Nobody's Island", where the only white man is Major D. Thompson, the civil administrator, whose only link with the outside world is a B.O.A.C. Lodestar, which sometimes puts down there to refuel.

over from the Hejaz, enlisting the aid of the princes and their armed bands, to drive out and vanquish the Turk invader.

After the Armistice Arabia, like so many 'sweet mysteries' man had once cherished, tended to be taken for granted by the general public. No doubt the numerous publications on the subject (the most outstanding of which was Lawrence's personal record of the desert warfare, the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*) in some measure accounted for this. But if Arabia ceased to retain some of its mystery, its fascination has never dwindled. Unlike some countries of the Far East, it is a fascination which is not lessened by travel. The spell which the desert casts upon those who come to know its barren and inhospitable interior is no mere fiction. The sand gets not only into one's eyes, but into the soul. A man may hate it, despise its infertile harshness, and long for the green fields of home, but in his heart there is always a delight when he recalls the sun setting in purple grandeur behind the dunes, or the tenuous shadows cast by a passing camel caravan.

Long before I visited Arabia I had absorbed much of the literature of the Middle East; not only such books as *Arabia Deserta*, but the more fanciful *Arabian Nights* and the poetry of the Persian poets, Omar Khayyham and Farazdaq. True, the works of Freya Stark, Bertram Thomas and Gertrude Bell helped to thaw the illusion of fantasy which I had imbibed, but there remained, and does to this day, a tincture of poetry in my outlook. Perhaps this is as it should be. If one is a geologist, one should regard a country from the age of its rocks, the mineral significance of its stratæ and formations. The botanist, seeking for flora and genera, would classify new specimens in the unemotional language of science. As I am neither of these, not even a specialist in anything save the interesting and adventurous, it is perhaps not unnatural that my own outlook was little different from that of the wide-eyed tourist. I had travelled in other countries, and had the advantage of being able to compare, say, Arabian village life with that of China or some parts of India, but my visit was fortuitous and had been arranged for me by the Government; I had no personal motive in going to Arabia. Like so many others during the war, I was sent, willy-nilly, and this record of my experiences and adventures is little more than an expression of my gratitude for the happiness they brought me.

Perhaps I was luckier than most in being sent to a part of the country less familiar to the world than the Yemen or the Hadramaut. Hundreds of travellers and business men, particularly in these days

coxswain can not only delay the aircraft by giving incorrect or vague directions, but can endanger both the aircraft and his launch. Yet during the whole of my stay at Sharjah there was only one occasion on which my Station Coxswain, Jock Frew, was charged with a minor error of judgment. He had given the pilot of a flying-boat a visibility of two miles. When the aircraft alighted, the pilot indignantly protested that he had been able to see clearly for twenty miles, and stated that he would report the coxswain for giving false information. Jock stoutly denied that he was in the wrong and he was supported by the R.A.F. Meteorological Office, which affirmed that local visibility that morning was, indeed, barely two miles.

Such were the pinpricks one had to endure in this isolated outstation. Of Jock Frew, however, I shall be content to remark that he possessed the keen judgment and conscientiousness of the ex-merchant sailor and Scot; and was, moreover, a loyal and lovable character. Although over forty, he had spent nearly two years in the desert. This would have sapped the energy of most men, but Jock had tremendous vitality and his love of his job and his philosophical outlook on life gave him exceptional resistance.

We had troubles other than those connected with transport. When the wild Bedouin tribes moved their camps, some of the more hostile tribesmen would take it into their heads to attack our vehicles. They would usually fire at the tyres and then rob the driver and passengers of any goods they had. To overcome this we used to co-operate with the R.A.F. and travel in convoy whenever possible, which proved a distinct deterrent. These attacks were never frequent and seldom serious, but they were a nuisance. The local sheikhs were appealed to but, whether through fear of Bedouin reprisals or incompetence on the part of their Arab 'police', they seemed unable to put down the menace. It was the American C.O., Major Raimer, who solved the problem by patrolling the desert with jeeps, the drivers of which were armed with tommy guns. As soon as this information had spread amongst the Bedouins, there was no further molestation of our cars on the Dubai route.

It will be gathered from my description of these experiences—and they were a regular feature of our life—that the desert is not entirely the land of romance which certain travellers, especially those equipped with luxury motor-cars and expensive caravans, have described it to be in their lavishly-illustrated books. There is not an author of Middle East travel I enjoy more than Miss

Freya Stark, who is always interesting and whose descriptions of native life and architecture are fascinating and picturesque. But even this intrepid traveller is inclined to stress the poetical side of her experiences, and to leave out the realities of smell and dirt. For dirty and smelly Arabia is.

The villages have no drainage or sanitation; garbage and offal are thrown on a heap outside the houses, or on the sea-shore, there to be removed in time by those voracious scavengers, the vultures and kites. It is a common experience to see the carcases of donkeys and other livestock lying on the shore, swollen and covered with flies, decaying under the hot sun. The stench within half a mile of an Arab village is simply appalling; one would be truthful if unkind to describe the Arab as having no prejudices against filth. In their persons the lower classes are extremely dirty by European standards, although they can scarcely be blamed for not taking baths, since water invariably has to be carried for several miles from the wells on the backs of donkeys and is, consequently, expensive. The Arab workers are very poorly paid, and prefer to spend their small earnings on food for their families, and the rare luxuries in which they indulge. The current belief that the Arabs 'wash' themselves in the sand is an anomaly. According to the Koran they are supposed to carry out a certain number of ablutions during the year, especially during the fast of Ramadan and the anniversary of the Prophet's death. As water is scarce, they obey the Holy Book by making a token ablution with sand. Anyone familiar with the grimy grey sand one finds in the vicinity of a village will realize that, used as a 'cleansing' agent, it probably contributes to the sores and skin infections from which so many of them suffer.

Another serious cause of infection are the flies, which breed in that climate on a scale to be observed nowhere else in the world. I have seen a plate of fresh dates carried a few yards from one room to another across an open courtyard. By the time it reached the second room it would be covered with a mass of flies at least two inches deep. Incredible to the insect-free European, this must be seen to be believed. Yet the Arab would not think of cleansing food that had been thus contaminated. He nonchalantly sweeps away the flies with his sleeve and proceeds to masticate the polluted mess with relish.

Apart from the piles of offal and refuse which are a feature of every village, another inducement to flies are the windowless shops